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THE DEATH OF THE LUSITANIA

BY
Mrs. P. Amory

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The EDITH *and* LORNE PIERCE
COLLECTION *of* CANADIANA



Queen's University at Kingston

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THE LUSITANIA

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BY

MRS. P. AMORY

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O *LUSITANIA*, Empress of the Sea,
Art thou dead and buried in the deep,
With all thy freight of human souls,
Victims of the Huns' most hellish darts.

Come Nations! Rise, avenge this hideous crime,
Avenge the cries of English hope,
Now lying cold and dead in ocean deep,
Come Nations! rouse, and crush

This hideous foe: this vampire of the world, who
is no man
But just a beast of prey respecting nothing;
Laying waste the glorious work of centuries,
Breaking hearts, and homes on every side.

Come quickly, come, e'er England's blood
Be shed in vain, her noble sons all dead
And lying on the plains. Come, Nations,
Crush this vampire into dust; Come quickly, come.

O, *Lusitania*, my tears are falling for thee,
Fair village of palaces, gone for evermore
Beneath the cold, blue waters.

P. AMORY.

THE DEATH OF THE LUSITANIA

LITTLE did I think, on the morning of April 27th, 1915, as I purchased my ticket for sunny England, that I was destined to endure the experience of being face to face with death before returning to my Canadian home. Neither could I have employed my imagination to conjure before me the terrible scenes that I was to witness in the most terrible disaster in the history of the British marine.

Now, as I sit in my home, surrounded by loving hearts and familiar faces, it seems to me that it must have been a dream, but I have only to recall the agonizing screams of the mothers and the children and the scenes of parting between husbands and wives; the husbands begging the wives to be saved, and the wives pleading tearfully for their men

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to come with them. But a law of the sea is "women and children first," and those brave men were doing their duty before their God, trusting that some help might arrive to save them at the last moment from a watery grave.

But to return to my starting and my reason for making the voyage when the fiendish piracy of the German was at its height. I am the mother of five boys, who have gone to serve their king and their country. Two of them were at the front in France, and the other three were training for the trenches. Realizing that a short vacation in England would place me near to them, and feeling it my duty to visit them, probably for the last time on earth, I decided to sever home ties for the time being, and in this case decision was action, for I immediately secured passage, and upon purchasing my ticket in Toronto was informed that I could sail on the *Lusitania* from New York on the 1st of May. It being the 27th

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of April, I made immediate preparations, and the morning of the first found me aboard that mighty empress of the seas, thrilled with the thought that a few days hence would find me with my soldier sons.

I had not bought any of the New York dailies and was therefore unaware of the vague feeling that so many were experiencing regarding the safety of the *Lusitania* when she should enter the danger zone. Had I known that notices had been posted by the German Embassy at Washington, notifying passengers that they were taking their lives in their own hands if they departed on this particular ship, I would have been undeterred, as I would have taken the risk to be near my boys, and at any rate I have never had a fear of the sea. The men of my family, as far back as I can remember, have been naval officers in the service of the King, and I presume that I have inherited a natural fondness for a voyage on the ocean. I was born aboard ship, and much of my early life was

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spent on the water, so that I am almost as much a sailor as land-lubber, and it is only natural, and not to be attributed to desire to boast, that I should have made the voyage, warning or no warning.

Aboard the ship, the usual hustle and bustle was in evidence, and after being assigned to my cabin, and seeing to it that my luggage was safely deposited therein, I went on deck to enjoy what is always a pleasant experience to me—the sights of a great, busy port, and the making-ready for departure.

The dock was crowded with people, come to bid farewell to relatives and friends going abroad. Time passed quickly, all too quickly, for even though I was anxious to be on my way, yet the interest that one arouses in watching a great ship prepare for a voyage is so intense that the thoughts of my journey were, for the time being, thrust into the background. Smartly-dressed officers were attending to their various duties, both aboard ship and on the dock. Great truck

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loads of luggage, and last-minute consignments of mail were being rushed aboard. Finally the rush subsided. Blue-coated officers were seen coming on the ship with their hands full of papers; these being the bills of lading and the consignment sheets for our cargo of express and baggage. Bells were ringing their signals for final preparation. The shrill blasts from tug-boats announced that they were ready to begin their labor of moving the great ship from her moorings, and the deep, throaty reply from the chimes of the *Lusitania* voiced her assent. Bridges were swung. Two more sharp exchanges of signals from the tugs, and we were moving. The mightiest vessel in the world had started on what was to be her last voyage.

We passed down the river and into the sea, and here our friendly tugs left us with many whistles of farewell. Such little boats they are, and so powerful. One often wonders where they keep the enormous strength

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that enables them to force the big ocean liners to do their bidding.

The *Lusitania* was now running under her own power, and the mighty engines were forcing us ahead rapidly into the open road that leads to dear old England and our loved ones, and I decided that I would go to my cabin. I was anxious to meet the two ladies whom I understood were to share the cabin with me; and, as the invigorating air, and the interesting sights of the past few hours had given me a ravenous appetite, I anticipated an early dinner.

I found my room-mates to be very charming ladies. One, the younger of the two, was a handsome girl, with beautiful, fair hair. When I first saw her, she was wearing a perfect-fitting dress of black velvet, and I was so impressed with her beauty and her frank, straightforward manner of introducing herself to me, that I felt I had indeed been fortunate in having such a charming young lady for a voyage companion.

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The other lady was older. I should judge her to be fifty years of age or more. She had been in the United States nursing an uncle until his death, which had occurred but a short time before our memorable voyage. This uncle had left her considerable property, and she was returning to her native land (England) to spend the remainder of her life among relatives and friends. I believe I have never known a more kindly woman, nor one who seemed to be more ready in a case of emergency to lend a helping hand. It seemed as though she had everything that was needed for sickness, and she spent much of her time relieving the cases of illness that most naturally occur during the first days aboard ship.

After we had become acquainted and had arranged our cabin to suit ourselves, my younger companion asked me if I was ready for dinner. I replied in the affirmative, and upon going below to the dining-room, we found that we were late for the first table,

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and had to await our turn. But I was permitted to get a view of the interior, and such a sight it was! It would have gladdened the heart of anyone to gaze upon such a scene as was then before me. Such a beautiful dining-room I had never seen, either aboard ship, or in the magnificent hotels that I have visited on both sides of the ocean.

The pillars, extending from floor to ceiling, were as snowy white as the linen that covered the long tables. The walls and ceilings were frescoed in delicate tints, and in the centre there was a round, open balcony, which permitted one to stand above and gaze down upon a spectacle that I believe could not be duplicated elsewhere.

Finally our turn came, and I was permitted to occupy one of the upholstered, swivel chairs that had been appealing to me for the last ten minutes.

But I must not dwell too long on details, and in connection with the dining-room will only say further that I had never seen such

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palms as those that were profusely distributed about the saloon. One of them, I remember, reached nearly to the ceiling.

The only other matter I consider to be of sufficient importance to dwell upon before rehearsing to you the final scenes attending the sinking of our ship, is in connection with the patriotic concert that was given for the benefit of the seamen's fund. Having become acquainted with those who were arranging it, I was asked if there was anything that I could do to assist, and replied that I might sell programmes, which offer was accepted, and I was given the programmes and started on a round of the first-class cabins and state-rooms. My first sale was to a man who I was informed soon afterward was Mr. Vanderbilt, an American millionaire. I asked him to buy, but he said that he had already purchased one. I then thought, of course, that I had been preceded by another seller, but when he smiled and handed me a five-dollar bill, saying that he

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couldn't resist my good-natured smile, I concluded to go further among the first-class passengers. I informed him that I would have to look for change, whereupon he said that he expected no change. I met with similar success in nearly all of the cabins and on the decks, and soon had realized well on my programmes.

The concert itself was pronounced a success by all who attended, and we felt that it was more than a success since we had realized nearly twenty pounds, which we felt would be a fine gift to the fund for which it was intended.

On Thursday, which was the day following our memorable concert, we arose early and went on deck to enjoy the breeze. The sea was calm excepting for the slight ripples that are characteristic of the Atlantic so early in the day. Before noon, however, the water was as smooth as the floor of the room in which I am writing, and we were very happy in thinking that the remainder of our voy-

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age would be made under favorable weather conditions, and that before another sunrise we would be landed, and our journey completed.

The elder of my companions (Mrs. Whiret) had been ill for the greater part of Wednesday night, and was still feeling badly on Thursday morning. But I induced her to dress, and assisted her to the deck, and I have been deeply grateful and all my life will be for being permitted to render her such an assistance, as it was the means of saving her life when the explosions occurred. Being on deck at that time, she was among the first of those who were saved.

At noon we were greeted with the sound of the first luncheon bell, and feeling warm, and not in the least hungry, I decided to have a bath and be ready for the second luncheon, believing that a dip would serve to increase my appetite. I left Mrs. Whiret on deck and went to our cabin where I se-

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cured a change of clothing and proceeded to the bath.

Fortunately I took my raincoat with me, as I thought I might not have time to dress fully before the second bell, and such proved to be the case. I had scarcely finished the bath when the bell sounded for second luncheon, and as it was permissible to go to the dining-room at lunch hour clad in negligee, I slipped on my raincoat, and hurried to lunch.

The bath had improved my appetite, and I was feeling as though I could go through the meal with a will. I took my place at table, and had given my order. It then occurred to me that I would like a salad, and as the steward placed the soup before me I was on the point of ordering the salad, when there came the most terrible crash, which seemed to tear everything to pieces, and to rend the ship asunder.

There was a rush for the stairs, and everyone was trying to ascend the narrow stair-

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way. Realizing that something of a terrible nature had occurred, I seemed to be possessed of super-human strength, and was able to push through where stronger persons were being held back. Some one shouted: "We have been torpedoed," and I realized for the first time that we were doomed. As I fought my way up the stairs, I was thrown on my knees three times. Near the top of the stairway there was an officer shouting "Keep cool," and his words seemed to have the desired effect, as the terrible crush subsided and those of us who were nearing the top found it less difficult to ascend. But about this time the ship started to list heavily to one side. At one time I feared that we were turning over. It seemed to me at that time that it was requiring hours of time for us to reach the deck, but in reality it all occurred in a very few minutes. When we reached the deck I had difficulty in holding my feet, as there seemed to be such a slant to everything upon which I stepped that I feared

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being thrown overboard each time I moved one foot ahead of the other.

The screams of the women and children were terrible to hear. Wives were being torn from their husbands and lifted into the life-boats. Children, who in the terrible crush of humans, had become separated from their parents, were being handed from man to man and on into the boats. Women were fainting and falling to the deck, only to be carried overboard by their own weight. The decks by this time were becoming more difficult to stand upon. I was trying to find a life belt, as I realized that without one I would stand little chance of being saved, as I had given up all hope of being able to reach the life-boats.

Just as I was giving up in despair, and was about to resign myself to the fate of the brave men who would be left on the ship, I was grabbed from behind and a brave young man said, "Here, mother, take this belt," and with

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that he helped me to get into it, and remained with me until I had it properly adjusted.

I said, "God bless you, young man," and turned to speak further with him, but he was gone. As I did not see him among the survivors, I believe he was lost, and never will I forget his brave deed, for I feel certain that he gave his life to save mine, and when I think of him I unconsciously quote: "Blessed is he, for he gave his life for his brother."

Up to the time of securing the belt I had not realized that the life-boats were being rapidly filled. But I was made aware of this being a fact by an officer, who was British to the core. He spied me in a crowd of men, and speaking so as to be heard above the screams of the women and the shouts of the men, he ordered the men to make way for me as, to quote him: "The last boat is leaving and this lady must go." Those men stood aside and let him through to me, and taking me by the hand he assisted me to the rail. By this time the last life-boat was swinging

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clear of the ship, and as the *Lusitania* was now listing so heavily, it was impossible for the men in charge to swing back far enough for me to step aboard. But the officer who had brought me to the rail was equal to the emergency, and when he said: "Mother, I guess you'll have to jump for it," and believing this to be my only chance, I jumped. I landed just over the edge of the boat on all fours. Just then the ropes on one end of our boat must have held fast, or else the sinking ship must have given a terrible roll, for we were brought up against the side of the ship with an awful crash and were thrown into the water. Fortunately we were nearly down when the accident occurred and had not far to fall, but the confusion was great. Those who did not have life belts sank almost immediately. On every hand were floating bodies, their upturned faces showing white and ghastly. I was so close to the *Lusitania* I could have reached out and touched her, but her motions at this time caused waves

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that carried me some distance away. All this time I was floating on my back, and try as I would I could not turn over. This fact alarmed me greatly, since I believed that my life belt was on wrong, and later this proved to be correct. At times the waves would wash over my face and fill my mouth with water, and I called upon God to save me. Each time a bit of wreckage would float against me I would take courage and think that a boat was near and that they were trying to reach me, but when the drift would float by I would again be possessed of the fear that I was destined to float around until I could no longer survive, and then to die. I could see myself being washed ashore a lifeless corpse, and I believe that had such wild thoughts continued I should have died from the shock of them, but again I was given hope by feeling something sharp coming up my neck and into my hair, and the next instant my head was raised with a jerk and steady voice said to me, "Easy now, I have a hook in your

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hair. Our boat is loaded, but your gray hair forbids us to leave. We are going to pull you part way into the boat until we can adjust our load, and then we will try to get you into a seat." I was overjoyed, and could think of nothing to say but "Thank God, thank God, I am being saved." They pulled me up so that my head and arms hung into the boat, and after a few minutes they pulled the upper part of my body over the side and left my legs in the water. We drifted this way for a long time, so long, in fact, that my legs were numb, and I wished that they might soon be able to find a place for me. But I was so thankful for having been rescued that I decided to stand the terrible pains that were shooting through my body, until they became absolutely unbearable, and then ask them to please drag me in farther. After awhile they seemed to get the weight properly adjusted, and I was dragged in. I raised my head just in time to see the last of the *Lusitania* as she sank beneath the waves. As she sank there

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was a mighty rush of water and we were rocked until we nearly capsized, but the men who were handling our boat were expert seamen, and after a moment of anxiety as to our being able to survive the heavy wash, we righted again, and the men took to the oars. It was now exceedingly quiet that I wondered at it, but the answer came to me in the mute, upturned faces that floated by, and as the gravity of the situation seized upon me, I thanked God that He had spared us a like fate. It was terrible to look upon children, oh, such little children, floating away out there on the ocean. Children who that morning were the pride of loving parents, and who were now the dead victims of a fiendish hate for mankind in general. These dear children had been sacrificed for the lust to kill, even though the killing be of infants. These thoughts came uppermost, and for several moments I hated the race that made war on women, and war on children, and I would have given everything for revenge. But, nat-

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urally, this period of hate changed into one of thanksgiving, and I said to those aboard: "People, if any of us have never given ourselves to God, now is the time. We are passing through a terrible experience, and without His help, we will be powerless." Nearly everyone prayed; some of the prayers were so full of joy at being thus far delivered safely that we for the moment forgot those poor unfortunates who were being washed about us and wept for the very joy of it.

But we were not yet out of danger, and when someone started the cry of submarine, we all looked in the direction to which he pointed, and there, sure enough, was what we all took to be a submarine, but which proved to be but huge fish sporting in the waves. However, we had been given a scare, and the men rowed like mad. An old gentleman who sat opposite me asked me if he could put his feet against my knees so that he might give a stronger stroke with his oar, and I con-

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sented to do so. Several times it seemed that he would shove his feet clear through me, but I knew that he was doing his best, and tried hard to keep from crying out with the pain of it.

After we had been going for three or four hours without sighting a vessel of any description, we saw a tiny speck on the horizon that appeared to be getting bigger. We watched it steadily, and it proved to be a fishing boat. We all shouted ourselves hoarse, little realizing that it was a useless expenditure of breath, as our voices would not carry half of the distance between us. We soon saw, however, that they were headed our way, and later we knew that we had been sighted and that it was a rescue boat. They came alongside, and we were taken aboard.

It was a dirty, smelly, fishing craft, but never did a ship of any description look so good to me, and as soon as they had lifted me aboard I fell to the bottom of the boat

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and lay there until one of the old men in charge came and lifted me up and offered me hot tea.

The tea helped to warm me up considerably, but my teeth chattered and my limbs shook as though afflicted with the ague. Soon we sighted another boat, which proved to be a cutter in search of any boats that might be adrift. They sighted us about the same time and turned their prow toward us, and in less than an hour they were alongside and we were transferred, I having to be carried; and we found that they had picked up several other boat loads, as we recognized many of our friends with whom we had become acquainted aboard the *Lusitania*. A stewardess took my clothes (all I had on was a raincoat and shoes and stockings) and dried them. We were given more tea, and by the time land was sighted we were in fairly good shape. From then until we arrived at Queenstown, the time was spent in endeavoring to locate relatives

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or friends who might have been rescued by the same ship we were now on, and those who were successful were overjoyed. But those who searched in vain were to be pitied.

Having no relatives accompanying me, I, of course, could but sympathize with those who were less fortunate, and notwithstanding the fact that I have seen much sorrow in my life, it seemed to me that this must be a crowning sorrow, and I broke down completely when called upon to view the intense suffering of those mothers and wives and husbands. One young man whom I had met came to me and endeavored to control himself, but with tears streaming down his cheeks, told me in a broken voice that he had lost his Mary. I remembered her as having sung "The Rosary" on the night of the *Lusitania* musicale. For a moment he turned and gazed out to sea, as though he was taking a last look at the resting place of his wife, who had not ceased to be his sweetheart. Then, seeming

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to gain composure, he turned to me, and in a slow, steady tone, with his right hand raised to heaven, he said: "Before God and man, I swear that as soon as I set foot on land, I will become a member of the King's army, and I will never rest until I have had vengeance for the murder of my wife, or until I lose my own in attempting my revenge."

There were many similar scenes, but many more where grief was too deep for composure. It was these that were responsible for my breakdown. Those bowed heads, the trembling bodies as sob after sob came forth, were more than I could bear, and I collapsed.

Upon arrival at Queenstown, I was assisted to a hotel, where I received every kindness.

After a day of rest I felt able to be about, and as I had lost all of my money as well as clothing, with the *Lusitania*, I was forced to wear a suit provided by some kind person at the hotel.

Being anxious to resume my journey, and to arrive in London at the earliest possible

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moment, I did not tarry in Queenstown longer than was necessary, but made ready to leave on the earliest train in order to be with my dear sons, as I felt that I could better bear the terrible reaction that must follow, if I had them about me.

I may have made a feeble attempt to set before you in detail the circumstances surrounding the sinking of the *Lusitania*, but I pray that it may not be as futile in interest as lacking in expression. That it was murder we cannot doubt, and for this murder we must have what reparation we can get by decisively defeating the perpetrators of such a dastardly and cowardly deed. But the greatest of all punishments that we on earth can give to these murderers and baby-killers is to stand organized to the last man if necessary, and take from them their military power that was so complete, and force them to their knees, begging for mercy in their impotency.

Our men will treat their women with respect, and well they know that no man who

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belongs to the army of Britain would loose a torpedo to murder their wives and mothers, but I trust and pray that the time will come when they will hear the echoes of the screams of the dying as our women and babies sank to their death.

THE END.

